

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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AMERICAN CROCODILE, FIVE OTHER ANIMALS ADDED TO ENDANGERED LIST

Six American and Mexican animals, including the American crocodile, the rarest reptile in the United States, have been added to the Endangered Species List, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The final rulemaking published recently in the Federal Register also lists the Cedros Island mule deer, the peninsular pronghorn antelope, the Hawaii creeper, the Scioto madtom, and the po'o uli as endangered. The bayou darter and the Newell's Manx shearwater are listed as threatened species (in trouble, but not believed in danger of imminent extinction). These listings were originally proposed in the Federal Register on April 21, 1975, and public comments were accepted until July 21.

The additions bring the number of U.S. endangered species to 112 and the number of threatened species to nine.

The American crocodile--Once a common species in southern Florida, it is now the rarest reptile in the United States with only 10 to 20 breeding females known to exist. Intensive human development eliminated much habitat, and excessive killing by hide hunters caused the decline. Raccoons also prey heavily on the eggs and young of crocodiles. The possibility of a hurricane or other natural disaster is a real threat to this small, isolated population. The listing of the American crocodile comes at a time when its relative, the alligator, is being taken off the list in some areas.

Cedros Island mule deer--This deer is known only from Cedros Island off the western coast of Baja California in Mexico. Currently only a few, perhaps less than a dozen, are thought to survive in restricted areas of the island. Poaching and predation by packs of feral dogs are thought to be major factors in their decline.

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Peninsular pronghorn antelope--This animal once inhabited most of Baja California but has been greatly reduced in range because of excessive hunting and competition from domestic livestock for forage. Currently only two or three remnant groups survive.

Hawaii creeper--This bird was endemic to the island of Hawaii and was quite common in the 1890's. The subsequent habitat alteration, predation by rats, and diseases carried by introduced birds and mosquitoes severely hurt populations. Their range is now restricted to a small area of forest between the 5,000 and 6,000 feet elevation where they are rare and extremely vulnerable to further environmental disruption.

Scioto madtom--This fish is known only from one locality in the lower portion of Big Darby Creek, tributary to the Scioto River in Ohio. The fish has been taken in a riffle area of the creek with moderate to fast current where the bottom consists of gravel, sand, silt, and boulders. It is endangered because of pollution, siltation of its habitat, and by two proposed impoundments on Big Darby Creek.

Po'o uli--This newly discovered species of bird is restricted to a small area of forest on the northeastern slope of Haleakala volcano on the island of Maui, Hawaii. Its past history is unknown but presumably its decline was caused in part by habitat alteration and competition of other non-native bird species introduced on the island.

The bayou darter--A tiny, silvery fish, this darter exists only in the Bayou Pierre drainage, a small river tributary to the Mississippi River in west Mississippi. It inhabits clean, silt-free, gravel riffle areas, but in recent years gravel-pit operations and poor agricultural practices have damaged its habitat and reduced its numbers. The Soil Conservation Service has proposed a watershed project which would further affect the bayou darter's habitat by adversely altering the water chemistry and contributing additional silt to the stream. This would pose a serious threat to the continued existence of the species, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service. However, since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is currently engaged in a determination of the impact of the proposed watershed project, it would be premature to list the fish as an endangered species at this time.

Newell's Manx shearwater--This medium-sized, black and white seabird once bred on all of the main Hawaiian Islands. Now its breeding activity is restricted to an isolated part of Kauai. This fish and squid-eating bird is thought to have been exterminated from most of its range by the introduction of predatory mongooses, dogs, pigs, and rats. The bird's attraction to lights also increases its mortality as it is killed by collisions with cars and lighted towers. Nonetheless, it is thought to number in the low thousands, and does not appear to be in immediate danger of extinction.